Private and Public Culture of Schools

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INTRODUCTION

From the early 80's onwards an increasing interest in organisational culture can be traced in managerial literature. Behind the rise of this interest there has been an underlying assumption that culture has been based on relatively stable patterns of meanings, norms and values shared among organisational members. As such it is perceived as something an organisation *has* and which is predictable and manageable. Anthropologists, on the other hand, have perceived culture as embedded in social interaction and thus as something an organisation *is*. Both views bring into question the notions of organisational boundaries and organisational identity that have been shaped and reshaped in a global context in which schools operate. Within this framework, the study about school culture in Slovene primary schools was undertaken. The study was designed as a qualitative, exploratory study of two case study schools. Meanings assigned to schools and the related issues were explored in documents, during public events, in interviews with a selected number of teachers and with both head teachers. Emerging patterns of meanings indicated the coexistence of what is here called 'public' and 'private' school cultures, the former being closer to a managerial view and pervaded by global language and the latter closer to an anthropological perspective, implying multiple, 'local' views. The existence of two cultures brings about the issue of the 'in-between space' with its potential for implication for school leaders.

ASPECTS OF CULTURE

A *traditional managerial view* refers to organisational culture as an organisational ingredient and hence as something an organisation *'has'* and through which 'wholeness is created and maintained' (Torrington and Weighman 1989, 17). Schein (1996) even claims that an organisation does

not have a culture if there is no consensus. Only what we share is, by definition, cultural. It does not make sense, therefore, to think about high or low consensus cultures, or cultures of ambiguity or conflict. If there is no consensus or if there is conflict or if things are ambiguous, then, by definition, that group does not have a culture with regard to those things (pp. 247–48).

It is not easy to find a plethora of definitions confirming this view. A summary of definitions given by some of the authors from the field of management is provided here:

- shared meanings – understandings that are created by group members as they interact (Van Maanen 1985);
- common meanings, shared assumptions, system of values (Sergiovanni and Corbally 1986);
- the glue that holds an organisation together through a sharing of patterns and meanings (Siehl and Martin 1990);
- observed behavioural regularities when people interact (Trice and Beyer 1990);
- interdependent set of values and ways of behaving that are common in a community and that tend to perpetuate themselves (Kotter and Heskett 1992);
- rules of the game that newcomers must learn (Schein 1992).

The level of sharing is often closely related to organisational effectiveness: the more sharing the more effective an organisation might be. The notions of 'strong' and 'weak' cultures (Deal and Kennedy 1988) or of 'good' and 'bad' culture (Beare, Caldwell, and Millikan 1989) in which a certain level of sharing is implicit is sometimes used as a magic formula for effective schools. In these terms, the head teacher should strive for as much sharing as possible. The latter raises the issue of power and of the possible head teacher's manipulation in his/her search for a 'strong' culture. From such aspect, culture could even be understood as a 'new form of organisational control' (Simkins 2000, 320) characterised by an ideal of 'commitment to the over-riding values and mission' (p. 321). From this perspective I agree with Simon's view (1996) when she claims that managerial perspective and educational policy have both generated 'the pressure for certainty' (p. 229) in which there is not much tolerance for diversity. Such a view might be found in the managerial literature giving 'universal' guidelines for managing and/or changing organisational culture. Moreover, various typologies of culture seem to be popular. Authors,

such as Handy (1985), Quinn and McGrath (1985), Deal and Kennedy (1988), and more recently Stoll and Fink (1996) and Hargreaves (1994) in the educational area have developed different typologies of organisational culture. Although Brown (1998) points to 'dangers associated with them' since 'no organisation is likely to precisely fit any one category in any typology' (p. 72) they have become very popular in Slovene managerial literature as a safe framework for researching this topic and for giving concrete advice about the best-fit leadership associated with specific types of culture. The leader's role might then be understood in a normative sense (Milley 2002), i. e. as a key person in 'establishing a set of rules that guide social behaviour' (p. 49) and as a manager of culture – with certain implications relating to power relationships.

Anthropological perspectives on organisations do not understand organisations and their culture as separate concepts. They are based on the concept of culture as something organisation *'is'*. It requires a deeper understanding of organisations, of processes within it and, most importantly, it shifts the paradigm from positivist one towards relativism. Referring, for example, to Lévi-Strauss and structuralism on the one hand, and Geertz and interpretivism, on the other hand, these perspectives may raise ontological and epistemological questions (Lincoln and Guba 1989). One can question the way managerial books deal with organisational culture and find it a rather simplified view of this phenomenon.

The anthropological perspectives seem much more sensitive to the uniqueness of organisations implied in 'organisations-as-being-cultures' belief. So organisations and their cultures can be understood as emerging 'from the collective social interaction' as Meek, (1988, 459) puts it and hence, as dynamic and non-finite. It also brings up a notion of boundaries. Clifford's (1988) belief that cultural boundaries are uncertain, Appadurai's (1998) notions of 'scapes' and of dynamic relationship between localities and their neighbourhoods as well as Hall's (1989) idea of 'extension' related to altering the environment refuse the images of organisations as bounded spaces.

However, neither the managerial nor the anthropological perspective of school culture can be accepted exclusively. Although the anthropological view may be understood as giving a more dynamic dimension to the notion of culture and a less positivist approach to it, the managerial notion of 'shared patterns' or 'rules of the game' cannot be neglected. Schools in Slovenia operate within a relatively firm legislative framework, they share common curriculum, they are organised in a very similar way.

Hence, it can be concluded that we should adopt the notion of 'bothness' when talking about school culture. It means that the static implied in the managerial view and the dynamics as the essence of the relational view can be viewed as complementary and both have to be considered while exploring school culture.

ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE IN THE GLOBAL CONTEXT

A range of definitions of 'globalisation' can be found in literature. Rosaldo (2002) defines it as 'intensification of global interconnectedness, contact and linkages, and persistent cultural interaction and exchange' (p. 2). Du Gay (1997) offers a double reference to the notion: as process and as condition. As to the globalisation as 'process' he refers to ways in which different subjects (i. e. media, individuals, social groups, etc.) seem to be moving across and beyond national boundaries. Pal (1997) also refers to globalisation as a process while he relates it mostly to information flow. On the other hand, globalisation as the 'condition' is generally used to denote that human activities are converging and being shared and the world is thus becoming more unified and hence homogenous. In a similar way, Featherstone (1990) refers to 'the image of the globe as a single space' (p. 2) while Hannerz (1993) introduces the concept of 'global ecumene'. Featherstone (1990) offers the concept of 'global culture' and gives a rather clear indication 'more in terms of the diversity, variety and richness of popular and local discourses, codes and practices' (p. 2). From such an aspect the notion of globalisation as a 'condition' relates to a series of processual relations between local/global, identity/world, modern/supermodern. Besides, one may also relate it to the range of possibilities of the notion of boundaries: they may be permeable, moving, osmotic.

The issue of 'global culture' should also be raised here because it can provide a view of homogenisation or diversification. Featherstone (1995) points to a different understanding of this term. On the one hand, it might be understood as 'a corrosive homogenizing force, as a threat to the integrity of all particularities' (p. 87). He relates such understanding to the formation of a 'global culture' through economic and political domination of the West. Tomlinson (1999) also relates 'global culture' to 'capitalist monoculture' (p. 81), to 'Westernization of the World' (p. 89) and thus gives it a negative connotation. On the other hand, the same concept might be viewed 'less in terms of alleged homogenizing process'

(Featherstone 1990, 2) and more in terms of 'the diversity, variety and richness of popular and local discourses' (p. 2). This concept might be related to Hannerz and his notion of 'global ecumene' as 'an area of particular social interaction and cultural flow' (p. 44).

Although I tend to sympathise with the notion of diversity rather than homogeneity, I agree with Clifford (1988) that 'both narratives are relevant' (p. 17). But I do not see them as 'each undermining the other's claim' (p. 17). On the contrary, I believe that they might rather complement each other.

The Local and the Global

When we refer to globalisation the relationship between the local and the global is also relevant. Bauman's (1998) understanding of global/local relationships in economic terms puts globality and locality as contrary values. In his view, the global dimension of the investors' choices when set against the strictly local limits of the 'labours' supplier' choice makes for an asymmetry which underlines the domination of the first over the second. Understanding global and local as opposing values also has implications for our understanding of organisational culture. When local (organisation) is defined in terms of fictional unity inside fixed, marked boundaries, then organisational culture may be perceived by differentiating it from other cultures. We may refer to a structuralistic view, in that individual culture can only be studied as a distinction from and opposition to other cultures. Boundaries play a crucial role since they define one organisational culture with respect to other cultures not to cultural 'reality' within these boundaries. But I cannot resist making a comment on one of the most popular definitions of organisational culture, namely that culture is 'how things are done around here' (e. g. Dalin 1993, Nias et al. 1993). The extremely literal understanding of a structuralist view may indicate that it is not possible to understand and/or to research organisational culture if we do not compare it with some other culture, when you only know what you are when you know what everybody else is not. In the context of global/local it may denote that local cultures are different from global culture. Further, it may reinstate the notion of global culture as a supra-entity, 'usually centred in the West and speaking English' (Hall 1989, 19).

The ideas of the 'global era' described by Mlinar (1997) or 'global context' referred to by Tomlinson (1999) are much closer to my consideration. Such notions do not put the global and the local as opposite or

even hierarchical relations (within which the global supersedes the local). In these terms, the complexity of the global context gives opportunity and perhaps even necessity for the difference. Mlinar (1997) relates the global to heterogeneity, diversity. Similarly, Naisbitt (1994) develops the notion of global paradox: although globalisation may be equated to homogenisation, it is also the precondition for diversification. Following Hannerz (1993), the 'global ecumene' has become an area of persistent social interactions and cultural flow, it has become a master organising our ideas. In these terms, globalisation does not weaken the local entities – it only changes their role and their relationships. Hence, I might agree with Mlinar's (1997) argument that 'understanding globalisation as a supranational organisation that is constantly weakening the power of the locals' (p. 585) is too static.

The dynamism that supports the idea of simultaneous processes of integration and differentiation, of stretching, blurring the boundaries (and finally erasing them?) gives us another perspective of school as an organisation and its nature in the experience of a globalised world. It opens the possibility of accepting the idea that schools as organisations operate 'in a world of many kinds of realism' (Appadurai 1998, 58) where the local and the global may coexist whether as opposite or complementary values and create a multiplicity of relationships and networks.

On the other hand, Tomlinson (1999) argues that 'globalization fundamentally transforms the relationship between the *places* we inhabit and our cultural practices' (p. 106, italics in original). Concepts, such as 'deterritorialisation' (Mlinar 1992, Featherstone 1995) 'delocalisation' (Thompson 1995) or 'dis-placement' (Giddens 1990) seem to open a different perspective to 'the place-culture relationship' (Tomlinson 1999, 106). Hence, these concepts do not denote that people cease to live their lives in localities, such as home or institutions they work in. They relate to the stretching of relations across time and space and about 'the loss of the 'natural' relation of culture to geographical and social territories' (Mlinar 1992, 105). Giddens (1990) illustrates his notion of 'displacement' by local shops that have become a part of a 'global chain'. Hence, locales have been recreated 'by distanciated forces' (p. 141) or placed into locales by global forces.

This new 'organisation' of relationships that have been created in the process of globalisation have reconceptualised or criticised the managerial view of organisational culture as an entity within defined borders. It does not mean that schools as organisations cease to operate in localities.

What becomes important is the way in which the process that Tomlinson (1999) calls the 'stretching of social relations' (p. 106) affects their operations. Within this framework, 'stretching' refers to transformation of our local experiences by global flows.

Actually, the global cultural flow denoted by Appadurai (1990, 296) as 'ideoscapes' has become a framework in which Slovene schools also operate. By considering these flows the idea of deterritorialisation may be applied to schools but not without considering their locality at the same time. For Appadurai (1998) the relationship between locality and its neighbourhood remains very important because the local would become abstract without 'negotiable terrain already available' (p. 181). However, we can understand the relationship as being continuously constructed and reconstructed against each other. Following Appadurai (1998) such a view is too idealistic to be applied to schools, for localities that are maintained by laws and decrees may only be viewed upon as context-driven rather than context-generative. The problem of continuous flow between schools and their neighbourhood is still very persistent in Slovenia because there is little (if any) possibility given to schools to be context-generative in key determinants, such as curriculum, organisational design, financing etc. But we should think from both aspects. On the one hand, educational authorities do not give much space to schools to be autonomous, while on the other hand, there is little evidence that schools would like to take the whole responsibility for their activities. Koren (2002) relates such relationship to his concept of 'visibility' saying that '[h]ead teachers took as much autonomy as they saw fit, according to how and whether it was visible to them' (p. 203). I might argue that they feel quite comfortable in adopting the position of being more context-driven than context-generative. Nevertheless, global trends, such as effectiveness or quality criteria, the desire to be comparable at the international level and the flow of ideas entering Slovenia from different media, might indicate that the link between the mundane cultural experience and the location called school has been transformed at every level.

We will rather argue that schools may function as territories *and* deterritories, as locales *and* scapes at the same time. Schools have their histories and probably also their own personalities in which 'a certain number of individuals recognise themselves' (Augé 1999, 111) in spite of a multiplicity of neighbourhoods. They have their unique existence at least in the imagination and memory of each of its employees, students and visitors. Driven by the global context of scapes, they might *also* become

non-places. I do not take these to be controversial concepts neither, judging them good or bad, more or less appropriate for schools. The global understanding of schools as localities, 'integrated into more impersonal structures' (Featherstone 1995, 93) maintained by ideoscapes that are being created by transcultural professionals and experts offers the capacity to dissolve the myth of organisation as a bounded place. In this sense boundaries between them may be seen to have 'become more permeable and difficult to maintain' (p. 93) – what (in my view) most managers would not like to experience. Global experience, however shifts the locus of control from the local to the global and this may cause new areas of anxiety and uncertainty and probably also the loss of a certain degree of power that managers may posses. But this is beyond the scope of this article.

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE CULTURE IN TWO CASE-STUDY SCHOOLS

In 2001, an exploratory study was undertaken in two primary schools. They were selected to cover contextual conditions so two schools that are situated in different contexts were sought for. However, the perceived effectiveness of the school was the most important criterion for its selection because culture and effectiveness have been so frequently described as related notions in the managerial literature. In Slovenia, there are no league tables according to which schools may be ranked. Despite that circumstance, the language of effectiveness has been heard for many years and one could easily learn which schools are 'the best' in a certain area. I was looking for an 'effective' (E) and for a 'silent' (S) school.

The main aim of the study was to explore to what extent meanings related to school and related issues (parents, pupils, changes, future of the school) are shared and what language is used by different 'actors'. Within this study three different methods were employed, namely documentary analysis (school brochure and school annual plan), observation (graduation ceremony and the first school day) and semi-structured interviews with selected number of teachers and with both head teachers.

Analysis of data collected indicate that different views on schools have been revealed by different 'actors' and so the issue of juxtaposition or the 'bothness' of 'public' and 'private' culture in schools was generated.

By the notion of 'public culture' the documents where schools are presented through address, telephone numbers, representatives in school council and information about the head teacher are referred to as well as

head teachers' public speeches who presented schools as united organisations where teachers share beliefs about the school and about pupils. The language of such documents seems to be pervaded by 'quantitative performance measures' (Stronach et al. 2002, 29). Teachers are referred to as 'subjects' they teach and extra-curricular activities they run while pupils seem to have lost their names. However, there are other presentations in documents, such as the regime in the library, co-operation with parents, organisation of meals, and the like – but all these issues seem to have lost their content. I may claim that such a style of presenting schools, teachers and pupils derives 'from concerns focusing around organisational objectives and outcomes and the deployment of resources' (Simkins 2000, 321) that can be related to a traditional managerialist view of an organisation. Common and integrated sets of beliefs, that were also ingredients of the managerial ideal of a 'strong corporate culture' were emphasised by both head teachers during their speeches. I felt that they wanted to present their schools as organisations of a 'common and integrated set of norm and priorities' (Morgan 1986, 127). I might refer to what Martin (1992) denotes as 'integrative perspective' on schools. Also, the language that is used in documents and in head teachers' speeches may be understood as technical rational. On the one hand, schools are displayed as bunches of figures, tables and organisational regulations, while on the other hand a 'false consensus' related to school 'values' was presented to parents, pupils and to myself as a researcher during both observed events. At the level of public culture schools seem to 'operate an apparently rational calculus' (Stronach 1999, 177) whereby they are compared by the number of teachers and pupils, by lists of extra-curricular activities, by the level of perfection in organisation, and the like.

Artefacts and rituals can be considered as if they were 'employed' to sustain public identity in these two schools. This view might even be extended to some other schools in Slovenia as they have used very similar artefacts and rituals, while I cannot judge such (dis)connections between what can be heard in public and what is going on in a private sphere of organisational life. But this potential comparison has opened another perspective on school culture and on the issue of identity.

My data indicate that neither of these two schools have closed their borders to the sorts of 'global' ideas that were revealed by the 'register of accountability' (Stronach 2000, 28) in documents and in head teachers' speeches. It seems that connections between the economic and the educational have been 'constructed as a kind of universal common-sense

magic' (Stronach 1999, 176). Teachers, pupils and activities within school have been inserted into the framework of universalistic assumptions of what makes organisations effective. The language of 'markets', 'quality' and 'commitment' that can be found elsewhere in managerial publications about education has obviously dominated in artefacts and ritual. Hence, I might refer to 'striking similarities' which 'frame and define' (Mahony and Hextall 2000, 95) them. Global flows that have been recently changing the Slovene educational context are undoubtedly reflected in the language used within the framework of the public culture of schools. In this sense, school boundaries have become permeable and unstable 'allowing' global ideas to influence school culture. I could claim that since 1991 radical changes have been introduced in education (external examinations at all levels of pre-university education, national curriculum even in kindergartens, the system of teacher promotion, etc.) a 'new discourse of normative comparison' (Stronach 2000, 30) has entered Slovene educational arena more intensively than ever before.

By the notion of 'private culture' I attempt to comprehend aspects of teachers' views of the schools, pupils, parents, changes and the schools' future. I got an overall impression that teachers' stories about the schools did not tend to be closely related to the contents of the 'public culture'. But this does not mean that teachers' stories were immune to global language and to managerial ideals of shared beliefs. Especially members of one group in E School seemed to be enthusiastic about their participation in different projects, about 'being already in Europe' and about perceived unity of the staff so that 'there has never been a problem with anyone' (Teacher M) as far as doing extra work or participating in ceremonies such as the New Year celebration. A similar register could be heard when teachers talked about the future of the school. Some pointed to privatisation while others talked about marketing practices that should be improved. But the majority of voices remained personal 'I-voices'. In most cases teachers did not speak in figures, nor did they use much of the register of an 'economy of performance'. They revealed personal stories permeated with joy and fear but also with pride and disappointment. So they talked about the 'hustle and bustle of the classroom', about 'naive and childish children', about a 'chestnut picnic with parents', about 'being old-fashioned in relation to changes' and about their plans to take 'these children more often to the theatre'. I could say that they appealed 'to different sorts of registers' (Stronach 2000, 30) than the documents and head teachers' speeches during events and that they

'comprised the accumulation of individual and collective experiences' (p. 30) with pupils, parents, colleagues, and with various changes. Each of their stories might have been developed as a case-study per se because they were so thick and so diverse. Hence, their views might be perceived as highly contextual, influenced by 'different neighbourhoods'.

In this sense, the 'private culture' of the school may be viewed as a set of diverse interpretations. Its members (teachers) 'do not agree upon clear boundaries, cannot identify shared solutions, and do not reconcile contradictory beliefs and multiple identities' (Meyerson 1991, 131). Multiplicity implied a 'private culture' in these two schools, referring to plural identities that are never fixed and 'never settle into a fixed pattern' (Grossberg 1994, 14). Teachers are actively constructing a community of belonging through a variety of meanings. However, it always 'matters how and where these meanings are placed' (p. 15). Hence, 'private culture' may be considered contextual and constructed of multiple meanings. From this perspective culture ceases to be a harmonious whole but rather 'the difficult whole' (Giroux 1994, 54) consisting of pluralised and multi-dimensional voices. Multiplicity of views and instability of patterns might also indicate that at the level of 'private culture' schools have been represented as multiple identities.

CONCLUSION

The coexistence of schools as 'private' and 'public' cultures opens up a question of the relation of the 'public' and 'private'. In this context, they are not viewed as binary oppositions nor are they viewed in hierarchical terms. 'Public' and 'private' culture exist side by side and hence, 'occupy a discursive space that exists in-between' (Bhabha 1994, 23). Thus we cannot talk about negation but about negotiation during which knowledge about organisations has been created. It is about a kind of dialogical discursive exchange, and about negotiations of terms. While 'public culture' seems to reflect a managerial view on school culture, promoting 'corporate identity' and 'shared beliefs', 'private culture' could be referred to as more of an anthropological perspective. But they both refer to the same organisation and neither of them should be considered more or less 'valid'. However, none of them seem to be complete and neither of them more important than the other. So neither 'knowledge as totalitazing generality' nor 'everyday life as experience' (p. 30) can ultimately be privileged. What we probably need is a different perspective on school

culture, a perspective of negotiation as there seems to be 'no first or final act in producing knowledge about organisation' (p. 31).

When we refer to the side-by-side nature of the notion of bothness which develops 'an interstitial intimacy' (p. 16) of 'public' and 'private' culture, an 'in-between' space where negotiations can occur we can open up many (un)discovered possibilities for head teachers' activities. Instead of merely acting they should shift their 'paradigm' to understanding, to listening to unheard teachers' voices and above all to use the in-between-space for constant negotiations between global ideas and movements and local practices.

Unfortunately, the 'in-between' space has not been utilised for negotiations in two case-study schools. Referring to Bhabha (1994) there may still be various safeguards, such as head teachers' 'bounded rationality' through which 'schools have been rendered predictable and controllable' (Jeffcutt 1993, 32). Presumably, our managerial training and the search for recipes might have contributed to it, too. There may be other actors that have prevented negotiations in the 'Third space' and have not been considered or discovered in this study but the key role of the head teacher as a cultural safeguard remains and this offers us (management training institutions) a great challenge for our future activities.

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